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ABSTRACT

After more than a decade of intensive experimentation and development, the field of interdisciplinary language and business studies is firmly established in U.S. higher education. Academia has responded to national needs, as evidenced by such programs as the Language and International Trade program at Eastern Michigan University. Various government agencies, foundations, and federal legislation such as the National Security Education Act and the Omnibus Trade Act provide support for such studies. Many programs include co-curricular components, with practical experience for students working in a company. In addition, an increasing variety of training opportunities exist for language teachers wishing to learn how to teach business foreign languages, business practices, and aspects of foreign culture that affect business relations. Professional associations as well as institutions of higher education are involved. It is concluded that these efforts and other educational reforms will allow the United States to compete and cooperate more effectively in the new global community. Contains 18 references. (LB)

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Digest

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Foreign Languages and International Business

(EDO-FL-92-02)

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As the twentieth-century draws to a close, more and more Americans are beginning to understand that a new, highly interdependent global marketplace of producers and consumers has emerged. Leaders in many professions now realize that fluency in a foreign language and multicultural sensitivity are essential in their fields if the United States is to participate effectively in this global community and if we expect to maintain our standard of living in the context of increasing global competition and cooperation.

Compared to other countries, such as Japan and the Western European nations, the United States is ill-equipped in certain basic respects to take an effective role in the international community. We lack citizens in many professional fields who can communicate in foreign languages and understand other cultures and value systems. For the most part, our schools do not incorporate global perspectives in their curricula. Most college students do not develop the expertise to understand even one foreign language and culture. Consequently, most American professionals—whether in business, government, medicine, law, or other fields—lack the basic skills needed to cultivate working relationships with colleagues in foreign countries and do not have easy access to new ideas and developments from abroad.

For these reasons, the U.S. needs to train many more professionals who can communicate effectively with foreigners and who are sensitive to cultural differences. Knowledge of foreign languages and familiarity with foreign cultures are a key to securing our national well-being in the twenty-first century.

Academia Responds to National Needs

This realization has prompted reforms in many institutions of higher education and public schools throughout the U.S., including the introduction of global perspectives in both elementary and secondary school curricula. In colleges and universities, internationally focused courses have been created, and interdisciplinary programs of study requiring foreign language proficiency and cultural knowledge have been developed. The application of foreign language and cultural studies to the field of business has emerged as a prominent component in these recent reforms.

One notable example is the Language and International Trade program at Eastern Michigan University (EMU). Implemented in 1979, it was the first undergraduate program in the U.S. to combine requirements in advanced foreign language proficiency, area studies, international business, economics, and practical training. The program has served as a model for the development of similar programs at Clemson University, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and many other institutions.

International education is interdisciplinary by definition, requiring collaboration across traditional disciplinary lines within academia. It also requires cooperation among educational institutions, government agencies, and the private sector.

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Governmental Assistance for Languages and Business

The growing awareness of the connection between national security and prosperity, on the one hand, and foreign language expertise and international competence, on the other hand, prompted federal agencies and private foundations to begin to fund innovations in this area in the late 1970s. Very prominent among these funding agencies were the U.S. Department of Education (Title VI and the fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) and the Exxon Education Foundation.

The most significant recent example of this trend is the National Security Education Act (NSEA), which was signed into law on December 4, 1991. NSEA created a public trust fund to administer three new programs dealing with foreign languages and international education: 1) undergraduate study abroad; 2) graduate fellowships for students who agree to enter government service or to teach; and 3) institutional support for foreign language and international studies in higher education.

Another important federal initiative is the Omnibus Trade Act of 1988. One section of this legislation, for which the curriculum of Eastern Michigan University's undergraduate Language and International Trade program served as a primary model, funded the creation of sixteen new Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERS) through Title VI of the U.S. Department of Education.

Co-Curricular Program Components

Many of the new interdisciplinary business and foreign language programs encourage students to spend some time acquiring practical experience by working for a company, either in the United States or abroad. Other institutions have created study abroad opportunities focused specifically on international business practices and foreign language use. Foreign locations offer the advantages of total immersion, direct contact with foreign business people in a variety of economic sectors, and personal observation of foreign business operations.

With references to foreign-based program components and to studies done in the U.S., site visits and work assignments at businesses, chambers of commerce, government agencies, schools, and other locations are a normal part of these new academic programs of study. Such experiences, requiring collaboration with the public and private sectors, are considered by many educators to be essential in laying a broad foundation of professional training and awareness for students who will represent U.S. professions in the world at large.

Another component often present in programs combining foreign language and cultural studies with business is access to examinations leading to certificates and diplomas in business foreign languages offered by foreign educational, business, and governmental organizations. Examples are those administered by the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry for French; the Madrid Chamber of Commerce of Industry for Spanish; and the Goethe Institute, Carl Duisberg Centers, and Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry for German.

Professional Development for Language and Business Educators

An increasing variety of training opportunities exists for language teachers wishing to learn how to teach business foreign languages,

foreign business practices, and aspects of foreign culture that affect business relations. For example, each summer the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry offers programs on the use and teaching of commercial French and French business culture. Likewise, the Goethe Institute and Carl Duisberg Centers have periodically organized Business German teacher trainer programs. Similar programs for teaching commercial Spanish are available through private educational organizations in Mexico and Spain.

In recent years, various universities have developed summer programs for professional development in the teaching of foreign languages and cultures for business. For example, for three years, the University of South Carolina has offered summer seminars on the teaching of commercial Spanish and Hispanic cultures for business, in conjunction with their CIBER; business German training is available at Michigan State University, with support from the MSU CIBER; and San Diego State University has offered training in the teaching of commercial French and French business practices in collaboration with the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Similar professional development opportunities are available for business educators wishing to internationalize their expertise and offerings to students. The American Academy of collegiate Schools of business (AACSB), for example, has periodically organized seminars and workshops for deans, administrators, and directors of business programs on strategies for globalizing the business curriculum. The AACSB has also published curriculum resource guides that provide supplemental material useful in internationalizing various subject areas, such as finance, accounting, marketing, and organizational behavior/human resource management. In collaboration with the Association of American Colleges (AAC), the AACSB has initiated a Business School/Liberal Arts Project to encourage interdisciplinary approaches to international business education. This project has two components: 1) a matching grants program for innovative strategies aimed at globalization and 2) a new publication called *Open Borders* (starting in fall, 1992) that will disseminate information on models for internationalizing the curriculum through interdisciplinary approaches.

The CIBERS are also heavily involved in professional development for business faculty members. The University of South Carolina and the University of Hawaii, for example, hold summer institutes to train business teachers in integrating global dimensions into their courses. CIBERS at Bentley College, Memphis State University, and other institutions organize summer study tours for business faculty, mostly to Europe and Asia.

Since 1982, Eastern Michigan University has hosted an annual conference on foreign languages and cultures for world business and the professions, which includes workshops, concurrent sessions and general sessions on all aspects of interdisciplinary language, business, and professional education. Considered by many to be the most important annual meeting of its type in the U.S., this conference is truly interdisciplinary in nature. The program includes both foreign language and international business educators, experienced international business people, and representatives of local, state, and federal government agencies involved in promoting global business.

Language teachers seeking training in the application of foreign language and cultural instruction to business, as well as business educators wanting to internationalize their courses and programs, can also draw on a significant body of published information. Hundreds of articles and more than a dozen books covering these new academic fields have been published in the past decade. A bibliography listing over 200 such publications was printed in the *Modern Language Journal* in 1991 (see Grosse & Voght, 1991). Papers from the annual EMU conferences are included in the ERIC database and can be read on microfiche at over 900 subscribing libraries, institutions, and organizations worldwide.

Conclusion

After more than a decade of intensive experimentation and development, the field of interdisciplinary language and business studies is firmly established in U.S. higher education. The consensus for globalizing business education at colleges and universities in combination with the liberal arts has reached broad proportions. Internationalization is also one of the most important issues in business education in public schools, with significant initiatives occurring in more than a dozen states. On the basis of these and other long-overdue educational reforms, the U.S. will be able to compete and cooperate much more effectively in the new global community.

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